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SUBJECT: GOI ADDRESSES CRITICAL GAZA SEWAGE ISSUE

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Embassy and USAID officers have engaged GOI authorities to press for entry of pipes, pumps and other equipment for an emergency World Bank project to address the high risk of an environmental and public health crisis from a Gaza sewage reservoir, but the Israeli response has been slow -- especially given Gaza's new status as a "hostile territory." World Bank President Zoellick has written to Foreign Minister Livni and Defense Minister Barak trying to assure access for the needed materials. GOI has now permitted access to Gaza for nearly all needed project materials. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On advice from World Bank regional staff, on October 10 World Bank President Robert Zoellick sent letters with personal notes to GOI Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and GOI Defense Minister Ehud Barak, asking for their assistance in gaining access to Gaza for the equipment needed to implement a World Bank emergency project to relieve pressure on Gaza's Beit Lahiya sewage reservoir (a 97 acre lake (about 3 million cubic meters) of mostly untreated effluent from northern Gaza). Oded Herman, Senior Advisor to MOD Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilid, told Emboffs and USAID on October 12 that he is willing to shorten the usual bureaucratic approval process to permit equipment to cross into Gaza. (Note: Israel's MOD controls all materials entering Gaza.) He requires a complete listing of all materials, a detailed project description, and further meetings to obtain transit permits. In parallel, he will work with World Bank and other parties to move the World Bank long term remediation project forward in the usual channels.

¶3. (SBU) At a meeting on October 18 with USAID, Embassy, GOI MFA and World Bank officers, Oded Herman reported that nearly all materials for the World Bank short term project have been moved into Gaza, and Bank Deputy Country Director Hadad concurred and thanked the GOI for its action. He cautioned, however, that access for supplies will continue to be a concern as the long term sewage project moves forward. After discussion of the risks and alternatives, consensus at the meeting was that a USAID project remains necessary to provide a margin of safety during the rainy season about to begin.

¶4. (SBU) A World Bank long term solution for new sewage treatment capacity in Gaza, at a cost of 45 million euros (USD 60 million) has been funded, but will take years to implement. In the interim, the Bank plans to finish nine new interim infiltration basins over the next several months. In support of the Bank project, USAID is considering funding an interim 2.4 hectare sewage basin with submersible pumps and piping to transfer sludge between the sewage basins. Once approved, the USAID project may take up to two months to accomplish. Meeting that timeframe depends on importing the necessary equipment into Gaza.

15. (SBU) Comment: The Beit Lahiya sewage crisis comes at an inopportune time, when the GOI is trying to deny Hamas resources to deliver services to Gaza residents in hopes of turning their allegiance away from that faction. Unlike, electricity or water, however, the deprivation of sanitation treatment capability in Gaza could seriously impact Israel too, and lead to pollution of the Mediterranean and public health problems that recognize no border. GOI Environment Ministry noted to EST office that Israel's sewage treatment system receives effluent from PA areas, and improving PA capability has to be seen in the larger regional scope.

16. (U) This cable has been cleared with ConGen Jerusalem.

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JONES